

打工妹 ~ Migration As A Means To Female Emancipation



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Abstract

In the contemporary globalized society, migration and urbanization have become pivotal processes that involve large parts of the world population and have drawn the attention of analysts. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have analysed these two phenomena all over the world from different perspectives and with different aims. This paper explores the present situation of the so-called 打工妹 dagongmei (young Chinese migrant women) who arrive in big cities from small villages seeking social emancipation or to escape from patriarchy and other social impositions they are pushed to accept as young women.

Female emancipation has been an important goal for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Following Friedrich Engels' *"The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State"* and the Marxist theory of female emancipation as a class issue, the CCP tried to involve Chinese women in labour (i.e. farming and industrial labour). During the 1980s, feminists and intellectuals began to criticize this policy because it had failed in its goal to bring emancipation to Chinese women.

The present research revolves around the understanding of the concept of 自由 ziyou (freedom) among female migrants in Beijing. According to the results of the survey, "freedom" has different meanings for the young women but it is possible

to sum them up in three correlated categories: 自由 *ziyou* meaning economic freedom, or economic independence with no necessity to rely on someone else (family or partner); 自由 *ziyou*, the absence of familial control; and 自由 *ziyou*, the discovery of new urban realities and subsequent experiences of great importance for personal development and education.

Introduction

Since the implementation of the policy of reform and opening-up promoted by the “little helmsman”, Deng Xiaoping, at the end of 1970s, the People’s Republic of China has been and is still experiencing huge internal migration. This is a mass migration with no precedent in human history. At the beginning of the 1980s, there were only 20 million migrants in China; by 2009, this number had reached almost 150 million (俞可平 Yu Keping, 2010). Independent media reports (Yardley, 2004) now indicate that more than 200 million individuals have marched from rural areas to the industrialized areas of eastern China. Almost one third of this figure is made up of female migrants. In certain areas and in specific industrial sectors such as textiles, manufacturing, cleaning, and the sex industry, the percentage of women reaches 70 (Jacka and Gaetano, 2004).

It is not possible to study and analyse Chinese domestic migration without taking into account the cultural, political, social, and economic complexity of the country. The scope of the current chapter does not allow for an extensive analysis, so it will approach the issue of the 流动人口 *liudong renkou* (or “floating people”, the term usually used by Chinese media to refer to migrants) from a qualitative perspective and limit the geographical area of analysis to the city of Beijing. Furthermore, this chapter will attempt, to a certain extent, to observe if and how the process of migration to Beijing from the countryside is a means of emancipation for the thousands of young female workers who undertake the move. The findings of the present chapter are the results of an ethnographic research based on semi-structured interviews and direct observation of young female migrants in Beijing between March 2009 and December 2010.

Studies on Chinese migration from a gender perspective started in the early 1990s. Important contributions in this field come from the research of Chinese and international scholars like Li Xiaojiang, Lee Ching Kwan, Pun Ngai, Li Yinhe, Zheng Zhenzhen, Honig Emily, Tani Barlow, Dorothy Ko, Elizabeth Croll, Zhang Hong, Tamara Jacka, Zheng Tiantian, and Rachel Murphy.

During the Maoist era, the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) followed with

fervour the political views of the Chinese Communist Party. They participated in basing the issue of women's liberation on the theory of classic Marxism, mainly inspired by the analysis of Friedrich Engels in his "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" (1884). Critical and independent thought about women's condition in China spread in academic and intellectual circles only at the end of the Maoist era.

According to the results of a survey entitled "Migrant workers and gender" (农民流动与性别 Nongmin Liudong Yu Xingbie, 2000), beyond the traditional socio-economic reasons and the "push and pull" factors, there are at least three factors motivating this new generation of young women to move from the countryside to big cities like Beijing: 1) to earn money, 2) to learn and seek personal development, and 3) to see the world. Thus, leaving home seems to be more a personal and free choice for individual emancipation than a need created by harsh economic conditions or miserable living standards in the place of origin. In fact, if during the 1980s it was very unpopular (or, in other words, not virtuous) for a woman of peasant origins to leave her village and work in the service industry in urban areas, nowadays Confucian morality seems to have given way to the need for mobility and speed dictated by the country's rapid economic development:

"Women's migration in China may at one time have been a signal of extreme poverty or desperation, but this is no longer the case. Now it is seen as a rite of passage by some young women, or at least a great adventure. In most cases the motive is still cash income, but often money is to be amassed for specific consumption goals, such as a new home, a bridal dowry, the bride-price for the girl's brother, or education expenses for younger siblings." (Jacka, 2004)

Of the many ways used by academics and media to define Chinese migrants, the one closest to the subject of this study is 打工妹 dagongmei. 打工 dagong literally means "to work", "to temp", or "to sell labour", while 妹 mei or 妹妹 meimei is translated as "younger sister" or "little sister" (Lee, 1998; 潘毅 Pan Yi, 黎婉薇 Li Wanwei, 2006; Yan, 2008). It is a term of Cantonese origin, used since the 1980s, to refer to the young migrants who ended up working in the factories of Guangdong Province, the "world's factory". Today, it is still used but more widely to refer to young girls (usually aged between 16 and 25) who leave the rural areas to work in the urban ones. They have a low educational level, are not skilled workers, and many of them come from poor economic backgrounds. And, perhaps most important from a sociological point of view, they are not married.

From a historical perspective, Chinese women have been seen for millennia in a

position of subordination within the patriarchal system, an order that wants them to serve, first of all their father, then their husband, and finally their son. The Chinese written and oral language itself is very well furnished with proverbs and sayings which emphasize this model of gender roles and relations. 三从四德 sancongside indicates the three different kinds of obedience (to the father before marriage, to the husband once they marry, and to their son after the husband's death) and four virtues (morality, proper speech, a modest manner, and diligent work); 男主外 女主内 nanzhuwai nüzhunei reminds us that men's duty is to work outside the house, a physical place much more appropriate for women; 嫁鸡随鸡 嫁狗随狗 jiajisuiji jiagousuigou (addressed to a woman) literally means "[if] you marry a chicken then follow the chicken, [if] you marry a dog then follow the dog", and highlights the importance of marriage and its indissolubility; 男尊女卑 nanzun nübei indicates the superiority of men over women in Chinese feudal society; 从一而终 congyszerzhong expresses the moral prohibition of remarriage for a widow.

Method

This paper is based on the outcome of a series of meetings and interviews with over 50 Chinese migrants in Beijing, mostly young women between 16 and 25 years of age. A total of 31 interviews were recorded. The language used during the survey was Mandarin Chinese. The author chose to try to establish a certain kind of friendship with the interviewees from the very beginning and not only an investigative/work relationship, a relationship that is sustainable over time and which, perhaps, could give rise to opportunities for further collaboration and meetings of various kinds in the future. No interpreters were involved in the interviews and no institutions or intermediaries were used to establish contact with the young women, only common friends (i.e. common friends between the respondents and the author). No respondent was paid to give the interview, but as a token of gratitude for their time and availability, a coffee, a meal, or (following the request from a few of them) basic lessons in the English spoken language were often offered. The interviews were conducted mostly in bars, restaurants, and public parks in the Chinese capital, and more rarely in the workplace. The author usually met the young women more than one time, even after a gap of months. The average time for each interview was 30 minutes; the minimum was eight and the maximum 104 minutes long.

The main difficulties faced during the survey are summarized as follows:

1) The language. Despite having studied and lived in China for over six years, the author is a non-native Chinese speaker and language problems inevitably arose. For this reason, whenever possible, a voice recorder was used.

However, this language issue was not the central problem: for these young women who come from rural areas and have a low level of education, Mandarin Chinese can often be something similar to a “foreign language”. There is an anecdote about it: while observing female workers inside a restaurant, a Chinese customer complained to the waitress that she had misunderstood the order. The waitress apologized, saying “不好意思 , 普通话说得不好 bu hao yisi, putonghua shuo de bu hao” (“I beg your pardon; I do not speak Mandarin fluently”).

2) The second type of problem arose from the fact that the author was not only a foreigner and a stranger, but also a man. This made it more difficult to approach the respondents. The young women of the Chinese countryside are very shy and reserved, and educated in traditional values that are rather conservative. As noted by the Chinese journalist and writer Xue Xinran in her book *“The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices”*: *“For Chinese women, the naked body is an object of shame, not beauty. They keep it covered. To ask them to let me interview them would be like asking them to take off their clothes”* (Xue, 2002).

The women were first asked for general information, such as their age, geographical origin, marital status, reasons for migrating, where they lived and worked in Beijing, their impressions of the megalopolis, and their ideas or plans for the future. However, the focus of the interviews revolved around the concept they have of freedom, asking them to give examples and comparisons between their lives in Beijing and in their village of origin. Another key point of the survey was to ask about if and what they have learned (in a professional, relational, human, or other way) during the migration process and their period of stay in Beijing.

About the Interviewees

At the time interview, the youngest girl was 17 years of age and the oldest was 30. Twenty-two of the 31 respondents were aged between 19 and 23. They came from 13 different provinces in China, mostly in the north near the city of Beijing, Hebei Province being most common. Most of them had a junior high school diploma and a few had completed their secondary school studies, but none had ever attended third-level education courses. Three of them, however, had done

courses of professional specialization.

All of them were working in the tertiary sector (service industry). Roughly half were employed as waitresses in restaurants or bars. The others worked as janitors in residential buildings, in shops, as hairdresser assistants, or as sex workers in massage parlours. The parents of half of the respondents worked as farmers, while the others' parents were workers or owners of small businesses in the villages of origin. Some of the parents were seasonal migrants themselves (seasonal because farmers cannot leave the fields for long periods).

In most of the cases, the women's wages were between 900 and 1,200 Renminbi per month, and accommodation and meals were usually provided by their boss or employer. Working hours were between 10 and 14 hours per day, six or seven days a week. Vacation days were not usually fixed, but occasionally discussed with the employer.

More than half of the respondents reported having at least one brother or sister. This exemplifies how the One Child Policy has not been as successful as planned, at least in the rural areas of China. This is not the right place to discuss the reasons for this or to deepen the discussion; however, it is important to note that female migration is quite often related to having a male sibling, since the remittances of these girls are often used to support the studies of the males in the family.

Main Findings

According to the results of a quantitative analysis conducted in China in 1994 (农民流动与性别 Nongmin Liudong Yu Xingbie, 2000), 46.1 per cent of the women who migrated from rural areas did so to financially support their families, 34.9 per cent to "see the world" (an expression used in the meaning of "to enrich one's experience"), 11.6 per cent to follow their partners, 2.7 per cent to be able to afford their dowry, and 0.3 to avoid an arranged marriage. In the words of the Chinese sociologist Zheng Zhenzhen:

"[in China] married and unmarried women leave their homes for different reasons. Unmarried girls pay more attention to considering their personal careers and futures. As soon as they finish their studies in primary or secondary middle school, regardless of whether their families can afford study fees or whether they obtained good results at school, they think about their future at once and decide to leave their homes to seek [opportunities for their personal] development." (郑真真 Zheng Zhenzhen, 解振明 Jie Zhenming, 2004)

The findings obtained in the present ethnographic work update and qualitatively support the reasons for migration mentioned in the survey of 1994.

Family ties

The classic model of rural-to-urban migration in China is the one realized through family and friendship ties. Usually, everything is decided before the migrant's departure (final destination, temporary accommodation, kind of job, etc.) with the help of relatives or friends who have already settled down in the new location. These contacts are the key to accessing a new reality. Through these people, the migrant will be able to build up his/her personal network of acquaintances, find a job and a place to stay, whether temporary or otherwise.

This model does not seem to fit completely with the reality that these new female migrants are now experiencing in the city of Beijing. Family contacts, friends, and relatives have still played an important role in the process of migration for these women but many of them simply left home of their own accord, looking for exciting adventures and to escape the boredom of life in the countryside. As already reported by other scholars, sometimes this new generation of migrants chooses a city or a destination simply on the basis of its fame and reputation, and do not worry too much about the accommodation or kind of employment: *"People ask me, why did I come to Beijing? I say, there is no Tiananmen Square in my hometown! It gave me a great impression in my youth. Beijing is China's cultural center, its political heart, so coming out is a way of experiencing that, gaining knowledge"* (Cited in Jacka and Gaetano, 2004). The following excerpts from the interviews collected for this study give a better and clearer idea of how migrants might go about settling into their new lives in the city:

"Once out of the Beijing Railway Station, I got a bus and arrived directly in 中关村 Zhongguancun [a technological hub in the district of 海淀 Haidian]. 中关村 Zhongguancun . . . Ah . . . That was during Spring Festival and many work units, companies, shops, and restaurants were short of workers. I had my diploma of specialization, I had previous experience, and it was not hard to find a job. Eventually, I found a restaurant where they provide food and accommodation for the employees, so I decided to stay. [. . .] Personally I think that in Beijing . . . to look for a good job, a job in which you're treated well, with proper working hours, I mean, a really good job, that is definitely not easy to find. But you can still find some sort of employment easily." (Interviewee no. 1)

“When I started to look for a job in this area, I was in an awkward situation. I had no credit on my mobile phone, so I borrowed a phone from my friend, but there was just one ￼ mao [1/100 of a Euro] on it. During the interview, I spoke simply and genuinely. I got no phone call for two days, so eventually I called them again. We had another interview and eventually I got this job [as a waitress in a cafeteria]. I have always liked this area, it is so quiet, and I love peaceful places.”
(Interviewee no. 12)

“One of my relatives works for a cleaning company, but at the time she could not help me in looking for a job. I have no particular skills, so I went into an intermediary recruitment agency. The boss of the office is also Sichuanese [the same geographical region of origin as the interviewee], a good friend of my relative. I have done a lot of different jobs, like street vendor, selling pirated CDs, cleaning, helping in a small computer shop. Then I went back home and studied hairdressing with one of my relatives. Then a friend of mine called me, saying that his group needs an assistant and that he could teach me a lot of things. So I came back [to Beijing] and stayed.” (Interviewee no. 15)

“One day my mom went out shopping and received a notice about a three-month training course. [After the course] you could be assigned to Beijing, not so far from my hometown, and it included food, accommodation and [a wage of] 1,000 to 2,000 [Renminbi] per month, and if at the end you are not assigned you would be completely refunded. [. . .] At the beginning we were afraid of being cheated, so first we asked at the local police station and we eventually trusted the notice.”
(Interviewee no. 26)

Economic independence

It is undeniable that the economic factor, promoted through Deng Xiaoping's well-known slogans, “To get rich is glorious” and “We should let some people get rich first”, is still a strong motivation for the new generation of migrants (both male and female) to leave the rural areas and flow into the most-developed industrial areas and big urban locales of the eastern Chinese coast.

However, the results obtained in this work point out that for these young migrant women who chose Beijing as ultimate destination of their migration, the concept of “economic motivation” acquires a slightly different and more sophisticated meaning: they are in fact talking about “economic independence”, becoming independent first of all from a financial point of view and not having to rely

anymore on the finances of their families back home. In achieving this, they do not see themselves as a burden on their relatives anymore.

Generally speaking, their parents were usually not in need of the money their daughters earned in Beijing. These young women chose to find any kind of job as soon as possible to afford a long stay in the city, to do some shopping during their spare time, visit tourist attractions, and enjoy their moments of amusement and recreation.

Sometimes they decided to send money home and the reason for this was often to avoid unnecessary expenses and not to squander their money in an extremely expensive city like Beijing. They believed their parents would know better than anyone else how to save their money or invest it for them.

Below are a few examples of the women discussing the meaning of “economic independence”:

“To be able to gain enough money to support yourself, to send back to your parents the money that you do not need, to be able to do your things and to think about your own life, to know what to do and not to do, to do what you want.” (Interviewee no. 24).

“Independence means [being able to] earn the money you spend, your parents do not need your money and you do not spend their money. [. . .] It means to rely on yourself and not always on your parents; all sorts of things must be taken into account by yourself.” (Interviewee no. 27)

“To study is good, but what I want is to work. To study gives increasing pressure to your parents, to work gives increasing pressure to yourself. When you study, you use your parents’ money, but when you work, you can save money and spend it whenever you want. And your parents will not use your money either.” (Interviewee no. 16)

“Life in Beijing, I think, is based on you, on yourself; you are not a burden on your parents. For this reason I [decided to] leave home and work. In Beijing, there are many [people like me] who do not want to rely on their families or spend their money, but fully rely on themselves. It is exactly like this. Most of the people who left home to work, they did it for this reason.” (Interviewee no. 17)

“No matter if the job is good or not, for me is always ok. If I am financially independent then nobody can interfere [with my life]. [. . .] If I am financially

independent I am also free. I want to be able to support myself; this is the most important thing. Doing manual work is not that bad. I can have a rest during the afternoon, I sleep in the shop. Here I have my bit of freedom. I use my own hands to gain money. I wish this in the future, to have enough money and enough freedom. This is the goal to achieve for my profession in the future; I can only try my best. You have to work hard for your life. You sacrifice your freedom for this little salary, this is how I spent [my time during] secondary school, and I was not happy at all. I hope to be able to decide my own life in the future.” (Interviewee no. 19)

Freedom: ideas and practices

Beyond the context to which we are now referring, it is never easy to deal with and talk about “freedom”. This brief survey is not an exception. Not surprisingly, the answers collected are multiple, varied, and multifaceted. 自由 *ziyou* is primarily perceived as getting away from other people’s (usually their parents, relatives, or elders in their village of origin) control over their daily life. “没人管 *mei ren guan*” is the most frequent response: “[Freedom is when] there is no-one who controls you”. Freedom means to have space, time, the financial ability to go around the streets and shops of Beijing, going into a bookstore to purchase a book, or inviting a friend for dinner in a restaurant. In other words, enjoying and learning from all the things that the Chinese capital city has to offer to the migrants, citizens, and foreigners of all nationalities.

However, sometimes it was not clear that these young women had more freedom in Beijing than they had with their families at home. As some of them pointed out, it is not easy to think or talk about freedom when you have to work 10 to 14 hours per day, 6 to 7 days a week. A couple of the respondents felt that they had actually enjoyed more freedom at home because their parents were working outside the home during the day and did not have the chance to exert pressure on their daughters. Some of them, eventually, admitted that it is hard and stressful to live in a chaotic and alienating metropolis like Beijing, “where the people do not look at your face, even in the elevator” (interviewee no. 4).

Despite those challenges, one positive aspect confirmed by almost all the respondents was the opportunity to gain experience on both a professional and social level. This included the possibility of practising and improving their English language skills with foreign customers in the restaurants or bars of Beijing, and the obligation to learn quickly how to deal (entirely alone and by yourself) with

the many difficulties of living in a metropolis without the help and the support of family or friends. In the words of one respondent: “[Beijing] teaches you how to become independent” (interviewee no. 3).

Freedom means the absence of annoying pressure from their families, but also a chance to have a more personal and independent life. Freedom is the dimension used to organize their daily lives, the decision of how to spend their salaries, etc.

“In terms of behaviour [in China], if a girl speaks freely and arbitrarily, her parents will not be happy with that; their way of thinking is quite traditional, a bit old-fashioned [封建 fengjian, literally “feudal”]. I mean, a girl must behave like a lady, and not be careless like me. [. . .] When I am at home I do not talk much, and I do not hang out often, because most of my friends or classmates have already left home to work. So, when I am in my house I do not even contact them, I cannot hang out with them. There is no-one to stay with and have fun with. I feel there is no freedom, but once I leave [my village] I can do whatever I want, earn money, spend money, use the internet, sing in the karaoke bar, eat with my friends . . . In this kind of environment I feel very happy and free. I feel that I can do whatever I want, it is exactly like this. If I spend money when I am at home, my parents will tell me not to do that, to save money, we need to save money. It is to say, I think that when I am away I can earn money and spend what I want, save a bit. I feel free when I can consume using my own savings.” (Interviewee no. 2)

“Many of my friends left [home]. I thought that was good. I did not want to study anymore, I wanted to leave [home] and work, too. I saw these people going to work and doing whatever they want. At home you have to do homework. I felt that there was much more freedom outside. [. . .] I realized you can do what you want to do, buy what you want to buy, organize your own time. At home, the people are conservative, there is much pressure, go to class, come back home. I felt there was no freedom; the others who were working away from home were having a better life, more free. So I quit school and left to work with my friends. Before, I did not like to study, [even though] my father wanted me to study. [. . .] Now I have a different attitude: working is hard, there are so many immigrants in Beijing, the truth is that earning money is not easy at all. I have no a clear objectives for the future. Perhaps I will stay here in Beijing, and see what the situation is.” (Interviewee no. 8)

“[Freedom is when] you are able to do what you like to do and to emerge from your own limits. But freedom is not limitless, its expansion is not infinite. If you go

too far in your freedom, this will affect your job. Freedom for me means to be able to arrange my own job, learning, and life; this kind of freedom would be enough.”(Interviewee no. 12)

“[Freedom is] to be able to do whatever you want. For instance, if I wish to do something next year or in the future, this thing must depend on me and should not be arranged by my parents. The kids of many rich people are like this. Their families have their own businesses and companies, so they arrange the education for their children, send them to be trained in the School of Economics, and once they graduate they go back to work in their families’ companies.” (Interviewee no. 24)

“This is the way I am, I can do things by myself. Sticking to one’s own principles and acts, without worries about what others say.” (Interviewee no. 29)

Nonetheless, there are also young women who regret the absence of family members’ control and help, as expressed in the words of this interviewee:

“In Beijing you can live freely and you have no binds, while at home your parents, brothers, or relatives take care of you, or at least think and worry about you. In Beijing you can have a careless life, no-one worries about you, even if you have friends, usually they do not worry about your life. [. . .] I prefer the life in my village. After all, this lifestyle does not belong to people like me; it belongs to the middle class, to the white collars, to the rich people. For poor people like me, this life brings only a lot of pressure.” (Interviewee no. 18)

When another young woman was asked if she feels free in her daily life in the city of Beijing, the answer was *“Yes. But I feel lonely, too”* (interviewee no. 28).

Final Remarks

The depositions of the dozens of young women interviewed epitomize not only the dreams, hopes, and expectations of hundreds of thousands of young migrants but also their most concrete realities, characterized on one side by difficulty and frustration and on the other by a partly realized desire for freedom. This is a freedom which becomes obvious in various forms of independence: from the economic freedom to spend (when possible) the time and money they have earned in their chosen way, to the many learning opportunities available in Beijing. These possibilities are not realistically available to those who choose to remain in their homes in rural areas. Leaving is often seen as an opportunity for emancipation, as

people and as women, according to a pattern that cannot be summarized in simple (and forced) labour participation in the community as suggested by the classical Marxist theories of women's liberation, but in a kind of emancipation that is more pragmatic and more related to contemporary Chinese society. The theories suggested by Friedrich Engels in his *"The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State"*, and embraced by Chinese communism and put into practice since the early fifties, state that the emancipation of women is closely linked to the class issue and "solved" with the participation of women in the labour market and social production. However, this model seems to have been largely unsuccessful and has become a target of criticism since the late seventies. In fact, Chinese scholars, intellectuals, and feminists have strongly criticized this policy of emancipation, opting for a deeper and more localized approach to studying the condition of Chinese women.

It is modest opinion of the author that the stories of these young women show how the experience of migration and life in a city like Beijing has provided them with several opportunities for personal emancipation. It might seem obvious to a Western readership that a girl from the Chinese countryside, with no educational qualifications or other kinds of labour skills, could learn a lot in a big city, both on a professional and on a social level, but perhaps less obvious is the importance that this has and will have for her life as a woman and as a Chinese person. "To leave home" and to go away to work and gain experience allows a woman not only to have economic and social independence from her family (and, for instance, to postpone or escape from an arranged marriage), but also to collect enough money to build a new life once she returns to her village of origin, after years spent in the city. This means she will have more choices for her future, even and especially on a romantic level. This means having the opportunity to start her own business (a small commercial activity, for example), and avoid getting married for the sole purpose of having revenue from the work of her husband. It means learning the unwritten rules of social and civil life in the urban reality, having contacts and relationships with men and women from different countries and continents, and is emancipating also culturally and compensates for a lack of education. Ultimately, it means self-emancipation for these migrant women to build a future more congenial to their own will, offering them a chance to escape what their families and tradition have already decided for them. In conclusion, and in the words of the Australian scholar Tamara Jacka, "[t]he expressed desire to develop themselves, to broaden their horizons and to test their sense of independence

suggests [. . .] that these women are concerned that their futures will be constrained in the village, and that they have a desire for new experiences and for personal development beyond what their village has to offer” (Jacka, 2006, p. 134).

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Violence And Identity ~ The “Self” And The “Other”: An Exploration Of Ethnic Relations And Conflict In China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region



Abstract

On the night of 5 July 2009, Urumchi, the provincial capital of the *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* (XUAR), witnessed the worst outbreak of ethnic rioting in the history of the People’s Republic of China (Wong, 2009). According to official figures,

197 people were killed and over 2,000 injured (Xinhua, 2009a). The majority of those who died were of Han ethnicity. The Han make up over 92 per cent of the Chinese population but are in a minority in Xinjiang. Their attackers were mostly of Uyghur ethnicity, a Turkic Muslim ethnic group which is in the majority in Xinjiang. The 2009 riot was not an isolated event, but the worst in a series of sporadic outbreaks of violence in recent years. These outbreaks of violence have brought renewed focus, both within China and internationally, on the issue of ethnic relations in Xinjiang and on the Chinese government’s minority policy and have had a significant impact on the construction and maintenance of the social boundaries that exist between both groups.

Introduction

Xinjiang, which translates as “*New Dominion*” or “*New Frontier*” in English, is a vast resource-rich province twice the size of Western Europe. At just under 1.7

million square km, it makes up one sixth of the People's Republic of China and borders Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. It is of enormous strategic and economic importance but remains, as it always has been, a potential tinderbox, as its peoples, old and new, struggle to find their place in an ever-shifting landscape. The central government is determined to secure control of this key region in the face of continuing resentment from its indigenous peoples (Bovingdon, 2010).

According to the 2010 Census (Xinjiang Statistical Year Book 2009) Uyghurs make up 45.21 per cent of the population of Xinjiang, numbering 8,345,622 people. The Han make up 40.58 per cent with 7,489,919 people. Next come the Kazakhs, who number just over 1 million, followed by: Mongol; Dongxiang; Tajik; Xibe; Manchu; Tuja; Uzbek; Russian; Miao; Tibetan; Zhuang; Daur; Tatar; and Salar. The 2000 census also shows that during the 1990s, Xinjiang's Han population grew by 31.6 per cent, mostly due to inward migration. This is twice the rate of the indigenous ethnic groups (up 15.9 per cent), who supposedly benefit from more relaxed family planning policies compared to the rest of China. This influx has considerably heightened the competition between the Han and local ethnic groups for land and water resources in rural areas, and for jobs in urban areas. While the most recent census was carried out in 2010, the full figures on Xinjiang's ethnic makeup had still not been released at the time of writing. The figures that have been released show the figure for the Han was hovering around the 40 per cent mark, while the Uyghur figure has fallen significantly to 42 per cent (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2011).

Ethnic identity (*minzu* – 民族) in China, and in Xinjiang particularly, is both clearly defined by the state and controversial. In Xinjiang, China's most ethnically diverse region and also its most restive, ethnicity has a particular resonance. This chapter conceptualizes ethnicity in Xinjiang both in terms of a classical Weberian definition of "ethnic groups" as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation or both" (Weber, 1968, p. 389) and the official Communist Party interpretation of ethnicity based on Stalin's definition of historically formed stable communities of language, territory, economic life, and psychological formation, manifested through a common culture (Stalin, 1953). It understands ethnic identity as something that is self-conscious and that this self-consciousness often has its source in the labels used by others.

As Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartman (2007) argue, the identity that others assign to us can be a powerful force in shaping our own self-concepts. Essential to this exploration of Han and Uyghur identity will be the assumption that an ethnic group cannot truly exist in isolation, it has meaning only in a context that involves others.

Based on a large number of interviews carried out in Urumchi from 2009 to 2012, this chapter is divided into two parts: part one will give a detailed account of the riots based on eye witness accounts together with contemporaneous news reports; part two seeks to examine how the violence of 2009 has affected how the Han and Uyghur see the themselves and each other and the role of social boundaries and relational comparisons in the creation and maintenance of group identities.

My research takes as a basic theoretical assumption Fredrik Barth's (1969) conceptualization of ethnicity, which emphasizes that it is the ethnic boundary that defines a group. Barth maintained that ethnic identities do not derive from intrinsic features but emerge from, and are reasserted in, encounters, transactions, and oppositions between groups. An ethnic group can only be defined and structured from within, and only these "objective" differences considered significant by the actors themselves are taken into account. He asserts that categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact, and information but do entail social processes of exclusion and inclusion. It is not so much who we are, rather, who we are not. Barth also argues that identity must be selected by groups themselves, a process he calls "self-ascription" (Barth, 1969, p.4).

Part One

Urumchi aflame: the causes and consequences of the 5 July riot

In the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the authorities expressed concern over Uyghur separatist groups potentially plotting to disrupt the games. At the beginning of 2008, it claimed to have broken up a number of plots and to have found equipment used in the making of explosives as well as four kilograms of yellow sulphur and 100 kilograms of nine other types of chemicals, along with computer equipment and disks containing "holy war" materials. Police claimed the suspects were planning to attack the Olympics as well as other government targets in Beijing and Shanghai (Hastings, 2011). In March, the authorities announced they had thwarted an attempt by Xinjiang "terrorists" to hijack a

Beijing-bound passenger airplane and crash it. However, despite its heightened security operation in Xinjiang, two violent incidents in Xinjiang did overshadow the opening of the Olympics.

On 4 August, just days before the games were due to open, two men armed with knives and explosives ambushed military police who were exercising outside their station in Kashgar. State media reported that the attackers had killed 16 officers and wounded 16 others. Days later on 9 August, 12 explosive devices were detonated in attacks on at least four local government buildings, a supermarket, and hotels in the city of Kucha, killing a security guard and at least 10 of the suspected attackers (Jacobs, 2008; Yardley, 2008).

The riots which erupted in Urumchi on a hot summer's evening in early July 2009 were the worst outbreak of social unrest in China since the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 (Wong, 2009) and would have wide ranging repercussions. Beijing had clearly anticipated trouble in the highly sensitive year of 2009 and had already moved an estimated 80,000 troops and People's Armed Police (PAP) officers to Tibet and Xinjiang ahead of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the 50th anniversary of the failed Tibetan Insurrection in 1959, and the 20th anniversary of the 1989 student protests in Beijing (Lam, 2009). China had been deeply embarrassed by the violence before and during the Olympics and was determined that it would not happen again in such a sensitive year. Yet it seems that despite the security presence local and national leadership were taken completely by surprise by the riots and left reeling as they struggled to regain control of the streets in the days that followed.

The official China Daily newspaper went so far as to describe the violence as the "deadliest riot since new China was founded" (Xiao, 2009). According to official figures, the riots, which broke out in a number of areas in the city of 2.3 million people, left 197 people dead and over 1,700 injured (Ansfield and Wong, 2009). As the crisis deepened, President Hu Jintao was forced to return to China from the G8 summit being held in Italy. While most of the fatalities occurred on the night of 5 July, it took three days and the deployment of thousands of PAP and regular soldiers onto the streets of Urumchi before the situation was brought under control (Branigan, 2009a).

Fight at the early light toy factory

According to eyewitnesses this writer spoke to on a visit to Urumchi in November 2009, the violence was triggered when police attempted to disperse a large crowd

which had gathered in People's Square to protest what they saw as the inadequate handling of a violent row that had broken out thousands of miles away in a toy factory in Shaoguan City, Guangdong. The mass, late night brawl at the "Early Light" factory, involving up to 1,000 local Han Chinese and Uyghur workers who had recently been recruited from Xinjiang, led to two deaths and 118 injuries. According to an official investigation, the fight was triggered by a disgruntled former employee of the factory who had falsely written on the internet of a young Han Chinese girl being raped by a group of Uyghurs after she mistakenly walked into a Uyghur dormitory (Reuters, 2009a).

Rumours of much greater loss of life spread quickly through the internet following the brawl on 25 June, along with gruesome pictures from Shaoguan that appeared to show more fatalities than the two reported. According to eyewitnesses interviewed during the course of my research, the original People's Square protest mostly involved students from Xinjiang University. The students had asked permission to hold a protest in the square but the authorities refused. However, those behind the protest decided to go to the square anyway and a crowd numbering in the region of 300-400 gathered, calling for a proper investigation into the events in Shaoguan. Police attempted to disperse what was at this stage a peaceful protest and, after a number of small-scale skirmishes, the crowd seemed to disperse. According to a number of eyewitnesses [i] many in the crowd were angered by what they saw as the heavy-handed approach of police. By 8pm, a larger and more violent crowd had gathered at the Uyghur bazaar in Erdaoqiao. The Erdaoqiao bazaar had once been the largest and most important Uyghur bazaar in Urumchi but has in recent years seen a large influx of Han traders and stall owners. It appears that this crowd began hurling bottles and stones at the small number of regular police who, being outnumbered, quickly withdrew. For the next four hours the city descended into total chaos with mobs of mostly young Uyghur men attacking first Han store owners and then passers-by, taxi drivers and bus drivers, while the police awaited reinforcements and orders on what to do.

By midnight, with the trouble spreading to a number of areas in the city, gunshots could be heard and paramilitary People's Armed Police officers in their distinctive green uniforms were on the streets attempting to restore order. In the early hours of the morning, along with the PAP spread out into residential areas, detaining large numbers of Uyghur men. In the region of 1,500 mostly men and boys were detained in the raids, which took place largely in the Erdaoqiao and Saimachang

areas of the city (personal interviews; Human Rights Watch, 2009).

Following the riot, XUAR Chairman Nur Bekri admitted that security forces had shot dead 12 Uyghur rioters but insisted police had exercised “the greatest restraint”, “In any country ruled by law, the use of force is necessary to protect the interest of the people and stop violent crime. This is the duty of policemen”, Bekri told a group of foreign and Chinese journalists on 17 July 2009 (Branigan, 2009b).

On the night of 5 July, internet access was cut in Urumchi while all text messages and calls from abroad were blocked. In the days that followed, these restrictions were extended to the rest of the XUAR while social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and video-sharing site YouTube were blocked throughout China and have remained so. The internet remained blocked throughout all of Xinjiang until May of the following year. No official figures are available for the damage this did to Xinjiang’s economy but as a largely trade and export focused economy it must have been hugely significant. One Han exporter of tomatoes based in Korla told me how he was forced to take the train to Jiayuguan in Gansu, the nearest place he could access the internet, a journey of between 23 and 27 hours, just to check emails from his European customers.

Over the next two days crowds of Han Chinese, many carrying homemade weapons, began massing in various parts of the XUAR’s cities, demanding revenge and in some cases attacking Uyghurs (Sommerville, 2009). According to the Xinhua news agency, on 6 July, “several thousand protesters, mostly Han Chinese, marched along Youhao Street and Guangming Street toward Erdaoqiao. The protesters held clubs, knives, axes, hammers, and various types of tools that could be used as weapons, and shouted “protect our home, protect our family members” (Xinhua, 2009a). A further 3,000 Han protestors gathered in the Jiexin Garden area. In a televised speech on the evening of 6 July, Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan announced that the city was now under night-time curfew. He told viewers the unrest had been quelled but warned that “this struggle is far from over”. Earlier the same day, Urumchi party chief Li Zhi, who would be sacked a few weeks after the riot, was forced to address a large crowd from the roof of a police jeep, calling for the protestors to return home.

By this stage foreign media had arrived in large numbers and were met with an openness that surprised many, especially in the light of the restrictions placed on travelling to Tibet following the Lhasa riots in March 2008. “Let the facts speak

for themselves,” a regional government official, Li Wanhui, told foreign journalists (BBC Online, 2009a). Reporters arriving in Urumqi were offered official trips to the hospital and to the parts of the city worst affected by the violence accompanied by minders, but other than that they were free to move around the city as they wished.

Rebiya Kadeer and the World Uyghur Congress

It was only on 8 July, following President Hu’s early return to China from a G8 summit he was attending in Italy, that large numbers of security forces (some sources put the figure as high as 50,000) began to flood the city (Lam, 2009). By 9 July, with the situation now relatively calm, helicopters dropped leaflets while trucks drove through the streets blaring messages appealing for calm and blaming extremists for orchestrating the riots. By this stage the authorities were pointing the finger of blame squarely at Rebiya Kadeer, the 62-year-old head of the World Uyghur Congress. In 1999, Kadeer was jailed by the Chinese for the crime of passing state secrets, although it appears these “secrets” were contained in newspaper clippings she sent to her husband in America (Bovingdon, 2010). Following her release in 2005, she fled to America where she set up the Uyghur American Association. Before her imprisonment, Kadeer was a successful businesswoman and philanthropist and had been held up by the Communist Party as proof of the success of its ethnic minority policy, and was even named a delegate to the eighth session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and the National People’s Congress. However, she fell from favour when she began criticizing government policy in Xinjiang. She has continuously denied being behind the riots and insists that almost 200 Uyghurs were tortured and killed at detention centres in the immediate aftermath of the riots while up to 10,000 were detained (AFP, 2009a).

An article in the *China Daily* on 7 July announced that the regional government now had “solid evidence” that Kadeer was behind the violence. According to the article, Xinjiang police had obtained recordings of calls between overseas “Eastern Turkistan” groups and accomplices inside the country. In the recorded calls, Kadeer reportedly said: “Something will happen in Urumchi”, The authorities claimed the World Uyghur Congress had held a meeting on 1 July during which they “plotted to instigate unrest by sending messages via the internet, telephones and mobile phones” (Xiao, 2009). A further report says that according to recordings of calls, at 11 a.m. on 5 July, Kadeer called her younger

brother in Urumchi and said, “a lot of things have happened, and we all know something might happen in Urumchi tomorrow night”. The report goes on to say that on 6 July, Kadeer held an emergency meeting with some senior members of the congress to make plans to further organize both domestic and overseas demonstrations and to call for intervention from foreign governments and human rights institutions (Xinhua, 2009a).

Whether or not she had any involvement in orchestrating or foreknowledge of the riots, the events of July certainly catapulted Kadeer from relative obscurity to international recognition. She has travelled widely since then, gaining significant media attention wherever she goes. In as much as a Uyghur independence movement exists, it has never had a recognized and accepted figurehead. The Chinese government has now ensured that Kadeer has become that figurehead, for Western newspapers at least, if not among Uyghurs themselves. In August 2009, two of her children and her brother wrote open letters condemning her for orchestrating the riots. Five of Kadeer’s 11 children still live in Xinjiang. Her brother Mehmet, son Khahar, who is currently in prison convicted of fraud, and her daughter Roxingul have all appeared on state television condemning her (Branigan, 2009c).

Emergency meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo

On the evening of 9 July 2009, Hu Jintao convened an emergency meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo to discuss the on-going problems in the XUAR. Standing Committee members agreed that stability in Xinjiang was the “most important and pressing task”, according to a statement issued to Xinhua. The Standing Committee ordered authorities in Xinjiang to “isolate and crack down on the tiny few” and “unify and educate the majority of masses”, while “instigators, organizers, culprits and violent criminals in the unrest shall be severely punished in accordance with the law”, it said. “Those taking part in the riot due to provocation and deceit by separatists, should be given education”. “It was a serious crime, which was masterminded and organized by the “three forces” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism at home and abroad and had resulted in great losses and done great harm to local order and stability”, the statement said (Xinhua, 2009c).

At the meeting it was also decided that the Standing Committee member in charge of security and law enforcement, Zhou Yongkang, would travel immediately to Urumchi to take personal charge of the security operation.

According to a high-ranking XUAR official.[ii] Beijing believed the local government had been too cautious in its use of force during the protests. While President Hu, no stranger to ethnic unrest from his time as Tibet Party Secretary, insisted from Italy on the night of 5 July, as soon as the gravity of the situation became apparent, that armed police use full force, Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan was reluctant to order troops to open fire. While this may go against Wang's hawkish reputation, there was clearly a breakdown in command on the night and despite having troops available, it took hours to bring the situation under control. A rumour quickly spread that Wang, who was disliked by all sides in Xinjiang, was too drunk on the evening to take charge. The fact that the central government changed the law on how the PAP operates within weeks of the riot suggests the central government was unhappy with the control structures in place at the time of the riot. The new law designated the PAP as responsible for dealing with "riots, unrest, large-scale violent crimes, and terrorist attacks" and crucially included new procedures for deploying PAP troops, drawn up by the State Council and the Central Military Commission. which took much of the control given to the PAP away from local officials (AP, 2009; O'Brien, 2011).

Three weeks after the riot, with the situation on the ground stabilizing, Nur Berkri set out the government line. "The riot is neither an ethnic nor religious issue, let alone a human rights issue. It is apolitical struggle between us and hostile forces on safeguarding national unity, opposing ethnic division, maintaining the socialist system, consolidating the Party's ruling status and protecting core national interests", he told a meeting of the XUAR legislature. He also pledged to find and arrest "at an early date" all other suspects who had escaped "after committing crimes of vandalizing, looting and arson during the riot" [Xinhua, 200b). A month later Hu Jintao visited Xinjiang, where he told government officials: "the key to our work in Xinjiang is to properly handle the relationship between development and stability in the region", emphasizing the "three unshakeable goals" of upholding the "central task of economic construction", "maintaining 'social stability and combating separatism'", and upholding unity among the country's different ethnic groups to ensure "joint prosperity and development" (Ansfield and Wong, 2009; Lam, 2009).

The visit of Hu had intended to show that stability had returned to Xinjiang but the authorities were deeply embarrassed in September when a bizarre panic over syringe attacks broke out in Urumchi and then spread to other cities. The vast

majority of these cases, however, seemed to have been imagined and the result of a hysteria that had gripped the region since 5 July. According to officials, nearly 600 people reported being pricked with needles in Urumchi, but only 106 victims showed signs of jabs, bumps, or rashes, while the others had been injured by sewing needles or pins rather than syringes, and a few had been bitten by insect. None of the reported victims suffered from illness, poisoning, or other reactions [Coonan, 2009].

The situation deteriorated further on Friday, 4 September, when a large crowd of mostly Han protestors gathered in People's Square to demand that the government improve the security situation. Wang Lequan appeared on the roof of the square's government building appealing for calm but was shouted down by the crowd. The significance of such a senior official being shouted down by an angry crowd cannot be overstated. For Wang, a member of the Politburo who led the XUAR for 15 years – far longer than the usual 10 year limit designed to prevent regional leaders from becoming too powerful- to be shouted down by a clearly furious Han crowd was a disaster as far as Beijing was concerned. The protests on 4 September clearly showed that Wang had now lost the support of all sides in the restive province, and that, most worryingly for Beijing, the social contract between the Han mainstream in Xinjiang and the Party and government of “partners in stability” (Cliff, 2010) was now in tatters.

On 10 October, it was announced that charges had been brought against 108 suspects allegedly involved in the riot (China Daily, 2009). As of September 2012, Urumchi's Intermediate People's Court had sentenced 26 men to death, of whom the majority were Uyghur and two were Han. The trials have been criticized by Human Rights Watch, who reported that “judicial authorities in Urumchi and Beijing on July 11, 2009 effectively warned lawyers against accepting these cases by instructing them to exercise caution in dealing with cases relating to the riots, and telling partners at law firms to report such cases immediately and to “positively accept monitoring and guidance from legal authorities and lawyers' associations” (Human Rights Watch, 2009). In January 2010, the U.S. State Department voiced disappointment that China had not agreed to U.S. requests to observe the court proceedings and urged China to be more transparent in its trials in Xinjiang (U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report: China, 2010). Just before the first executions were carried out on 3 November 2010, it was announced that a new “Strike Hard” campaign had begun in Xinjiang with the

intention of “further consolidating the fruits of maintaining stability and eliminating security dangers” (Reuters, 2009b).

Wang Lequan’s removal and reaction

On 24 April 2010, Vice-President Xi Jinping flew to Urumchi to announce that Wang was being removed and replaced by Hunan Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian. Beijing squarely blamed mismanagement by local officials rather than fundamental policy problems for the July riots. This was made clear at a top-level meeting on the development of Xinjiang in Beijing on 29 March when Vice Premier Li Keqiang and senior leader Zhou Yongkang called for collaboration between central ministries, designated provinces and municipalities, and Xinjiang’s regional government to build the region into a “moderately well-off society” in the next decade. Zhou, who heads the CPC’s Central Political and Legislative Affairs Committee, and who has long been China’s top security official, pulled no punches when he called on the XUAR leadership to “set up work groups as soon as possible, to select competent officials to work in Xinjiang, to enhance the training of these officials, and immediately start projects that could solve urgent problems in Xinjiang” [Xinhua, 2010]. Such public, albeit veiled, criticism of provincial authorities is highly unusual in China and pointed to a clear breakdown in trust between Beijing and Urumchi in the last year of Wang’s leadership.

In January 2010, it was reported that annual spending on security in Xinjiang would be increased by almost 90 per cent to 2.89 billion Renminbi (U.S. \$457 million). Making the announcement, Wan Haichuan, director of the region’s finance department, said: “the government decided to increase the spending on public security this year to enhance social stability in Xinjiang”. Speaking at the same press conference, Nur Bekri repeated the official assertion that the “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism were responsible for the rioting in Urumchi [Xinhua, 2010]. In March that year, it was announced that Xinjiang planned to invest 120 billion Renminbi in 200 major projects in 2010, prioritizing the construction of “hydraulic engineering, transportation, communication, energy, ecological and livelihood projects” (People’s Daily Online, 2010).

There was speculation that Zhang Chunxian’s appointment might herald a new approach in Xinjiang. Much has been made of Zhang’s reputation for openness and, ironically for a region where the internet had been blocked since the

previous July, his use of the web to communicate directly with the people. Announcing Zhang's appointment, Xi Jinping said the ex-Minister of Communication was a man endowed with "liberated ideas, a clear-thinking mind and a spirit of creative thought" (China Daily, 2010a). Within days of his appointment it was announced that candidates applying for government jobs and those hired in the previous two years would have to learn Uyghur (China Daily, 2010b). However, even a cursory examination of the policy, which says that those who meet the other requirements but fail the language test will have to attend a three-month course, would suggest that officials might not be required to be all that proficient. In the months that followed the riots, there was no indication of any change in the policy of rigid security clampdowns coupled with huge investment. When Zhang was faced with riots and bombs in Hotan and Kashgar in the summer of 2011, his reaction was a swift security clampdown and further extension of the Strike Hard campaign. It is interesting to note that in the aftermath of the 2011 Kashgar attacks which left 19 people dead, local authorities said that those involved had received training in Pakistan (Demick, 2011). The central government would later play down any links at the risk of damaging relations with its "all-weather friend".

Part Two

Perceptions, views and beliefs: prejudices and stereotypes

In seeking to understand what effect the violence of 2009 had on how both Uyghur and Han residents see themselves and each other, this section will focus on the relational content of a collective identities of these two groups. This relational content is composed of comparisons and references to other collective identities, "These comparisons can be thought of as the discursive formulations of the relations between groups of people that compose social reality" (Abdelal et al., 2006, p. 703). In his work on the Middle East peace process, Michael Barnett (1999) argues that identity represents "the understanding of oneself in relation to others", Group identities, in short, are not personal or psychological, they are fundamentally social and relational, defined by the actor's interaction with and relationship to others. Therefore, identities may be contingent, dependent on the actor's interaction with others and place within an institutional context.

In order to demonstrate relational comparisons as identity content, this chapter examines the mutual perceptions, the views and beliefs Han and Uyghur interviewees hold about each other. It shall demonstrate that the two groups

often express prejudices and strongly negative views of each other and will show how these views and beliefs affect relationships and social contact between Uyghurs and Han. It will also explore what effect increased political and social conflicts have had on these relational comparisons. Finally, it examines the relational comparisons people living in Xinjiang make with inner China. The key methodologies used to gather information on the content and contestation of ethnic identity in Xinjiang were qualitative semi-structured interviews and both overt and covert participant observation methods. This qualitative approach allowed me to take advantage of my 10 years' experience living in and travelling to Xinjiang. In that time, I have built up a wide range of contacts in both the Han and Uyghur communities. These networks allowed trust to be established with my interviewees and ensured they were comfortable with the process and understood my purpose. In research periods between June 2009 and May 2012 I interviewed 121 people, of whom 64 were Han, 53 Uyghur, two of Hui ethnicity, and two Kazakh. This chapter presents just a short selection of these interviews but quotations have been chosen to give account of the most common themes that arose during interviews. Good qualitative research is designed to help people understand a situation in its entirety rather than to present something that is enigmatic and confusing (Eisner, 1991). Reliability and validity are both classical criteria for assessing the procedure and results of qualitative research (Flick, 2009). "Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observers on different occasions" (Silverman, 2000, p.188). The quotations presented in this thesis are examples of the most consistent responses to questions which were guided by my theoretical assumption and framework.

An indication of the deep rooted mutual distrust that exists on both sides was the large number of prejudices and negative stereotypes expressed by interviewees. It was also notable that many interviewees seemed more willing to express prejudices and negative stereotypes when being interviewed with others present rather than in one-to-one interviews. This reveals that the holding of, and expression of, prejudicial views was not just socially acceptable but also often socially encouraged. While the authorities may constantly stress ethnic harmony, it seems that this has not led to a social taboo on speaking disparagingly of other ethnic groups. An example of such prejudicial views was given by a 38-year-old Han restaurant owner:

"Unfortunately many Uyghurs are thieves; it is their nature and they have always

been that way. Many Uyghurs make their living from stealing from people. I have been robbed in the past and so have many of my friends. It's not a case of education, they cannot be educated not to be thieves, they need to be severely punished and then they will learn." (Field research notes, November 2010)

Some Han interviewees also spoke of a poor Uyghur intellect, as seen in this statement from a 31-year-old factory supervisor:

"One big problem I have in my job is that the Uyghur workers are not very smart. If you explain something to a Han you have to explain the same thing three times to a Uyghur. It is nearly always the case that the Uyghur worker won't understand what I tell him. It is very frustrating but what can you do? You have to be patient with them." (Field research notes, November 2010)

One Han woman, a 41-year-old Urumchi shop owner, expressed another common prejudice that Uyghurs are lazy:

"All Uyghur men want to do is get drunk and laze around, that's all they think about. Many of them are very ignorant and they don't want to work. We Hans are hardworking people but they are not. Ask anyone who employs them and they will all tell you the same, that it is very difficult to get them to do anything." (Field research notes, June 2009)

Even before the 2009 riots, Han interviewees often mentioned that Uyghurs were dangerous and that they often use the knives their men traditionally carry for violence. It is legal for Uyghurs to carry knives but Hans are prohibited from doing so. A 22-year-old student from Korla warned me:

"You should be careful, especially at night-time. Uyghurs carry knives and some use them to rob people. If they see a foreigner they will think you have a lot of money and want to rob you and they might use a knife. They can be very dangerous." (Field research notes, June 2009)

Prejudicial views of Uyghurs as dangerous and indolent are also held by many people in inner China. In the eastern cities where large numbers of Uyghurs have moved in recent years, there is a common belief that Uyghurs are heavily involved in crime. While some Uyghurs in eastern cities are involved in crime, especially pick-pocketing and selling hashish, the perception of many is that this is not an activity engaged in by a minority but a majority. I once saw a police notice poster in a Shanghai apartment block warning residents that a lot of "Xinjiang people" (新疆人) had moved to the area and that they should be careful. Reading this

notice, any Shanghainese person would immediately assume that “Xinjiang people” meant Uyghur. These perceptions and prejudices fit with the identifying of ethnic minorities in China as wild and savage and needing to be tamed and civilized.

Uyghur interviewees were just as likely to mention prejudices and negative stereotypes of the Han. One of the most common was that they were greedy and obsessed with money and that they are unscrupulous and lacking in morals. A 21-year-old university student originally from Korla but studying in Urumchi told me: *“A Han only wants to make money, that’s all he thinks about. He will do anything, even sell his son or sell his mother. They are obsessed, that’s all they talk about, all they think about. Every conversation is about how much this costs or how much they earned. It is because they have no religion, no faith; money is their religion. The Han here are even worse than in China because they came here just to make money. They don’t want to live here, they don’t like it, they don’t like the climate but they will stay here until they make money and that is what they obsess about. They are getting worse too. In my class all the Han now talk about is how much they spent on a mobile phone or their designer bags or clothes or whatever, it depresses me to hear them.”* (Field research notes, May 2012)

Other interviewees expressed a view that the Han could not be trusted in business dealings. One 65-year-old trader said:

“I have done a lot of business with the Han over the years and they have often cheated me. I do not really trust them. Sometimes they are OK and sometimes they are not but you ask any trader what they think of them and they will tell you the same thing, in general they are not to be trusted.” (Field research notes, June 2009)

Personal and food hygiene were also mentioned by many Uyghur interviewees. The Uyghur emphasis on strictly avoiding pork or coming into contact with pigs is not just a dietary prescription for many Uyghurs but is used as a means to separate and segregate themselves from the Han. For some interviewees, it was not just the fact that they ate pork that made the Han unhygienic, but it was just one aspect of their general “uncleanness”, a 21-year-old baker originally from southern Xinjiang but now living in Urumchi expressed his views in this way:

“Really the truth is the Han people are dirty. They eat pork, that is dirty, but also their homes are dirty. You can see where the Han live, there is always rubbish thrown outside. The kitchens are especially dirty. If you walk past a Han

restaurant and you can see how filthy it is on the inside. It's amazing any people would eat there, but they don't care. They don't care how dirty a place is or how dirty they are." (Field research notes, November 2010)

This prejudicial stereotype was also expressed other Uyghur interviewees, including a 34-year-old teacher in a Uyghur school just outside of Urumchi, who told me:

"Many of the Han living here are from very poor parts of China. Some of them are very uncivilized. You can see it in the way they talk, they are always spitting and blowing their noses and in the noise they make when eating. Many of them do not wash very often. I really think there is a difference with Uyghur people. We Uyghurs think bathing and keeping a good appearance is very importance. Uyghur men visit the barbers almost every week for shaves and haircuts but you see so many Han men with dirty hair who don't seem to care how they look." (Field research notes, November 2010)

A majority of interviewees from both ethnicities, when asked about the major differences between Han and Uyghur, mentioned food, and very often it was the first difference mentioned. The following response from a 24-year-old female Han middle-school teacher was typical:

"The Uyghur and the Han are quite different, their cultural practices are different, and one of the main differences is the food. They [Uyghurs] won't eat pork and they won't go to a Han restaurant because they think they might be accidentally served pork. I don't really know why that is. It is a practice that is maybe old fashioned and maybe as the Uyghur develop they may start to eat pork. My husband has Uyghur colleagues and sometimes we have dinner with them but we always have to go to a Uyghur or Hui restaurant. The food is OK but I prefer our Han food. It's nice sometimes for a change but we are Chinese and pork is very important to us." (Field research notes, November 2010)

Here we can see that the respondent, whose parents arrived in Xinjiang in the 1960s, equates the restriction on eating pork as something old fashioned and by extension backward (*loughou*). It is notable that this view is clearly linked to the Party's conceptualization of the minorities as being helped by their Han brothers and sisters, whose arrival in their "frontier" regions has "liberated" them from their backward conditions.

The link between what is considered to be hygienic and the concept of what is "civilized", and the creation of and adherence to constitutive norms, is

particularly strong in Xinjiang.

Post-7/S relational comparisons

There was a notable increase in negative relational comparisons following the violence of July 2009. When conducting research in November 2009, with emotions still running very high on both sides, a number of interviewees expressed more forcefully negative views than recorded at any other time in Xinjiang since I had first visited the region in 2002. While some interviewees expressed the view that such an event was unlikely to happen again, now that there was such a strong security presence in the region, many Han and Uyghur interviewees spoke of July 2009 and as having significantly impacted on the views and beliefs they hold about the other identity group.

While according to official figures (Xiao 2009) the majority of victims of the violence were Han, it was clear from my interviews that a significant proportion of Uyghurs believe that the number of Uyghur deaths was underreported. In the immediate aftermath of the violence, many Han interviewees followed the government line and blamed separatists and often specifically mentioned Rebiya Kadeer. As they spoke further, however, many became more critical of Uyghurs in general. An example of this in the statement of a 37-year-old Han businessman in Urumchi, who said he knew people who had been killed on the night of 5 July:

"7/5 was caused by people who want to split this country and it was planned from America by that Uyghur woman Rebiya. It was a deliberate attack on our country. As soon as the Uyghurs saw something was happening they started killing and beating Han people, they were just waiting for the chance. I have lived here all my life and I have always known Uyghur people and have done business with them but this shocked me, that given any chance, that they would kill me and my family. I will never trust them again." (Field research notes, November 2009)

Another Han Urumchi resident, a 23-year-old driver, expressed similar views:

"No Han can ever trust a Uyghur again. When they got the opportunity they tried to kill us. They have done it before and they will do it again. Whatever about who organized it, the truth is they want to get us to leave here. We need the army and the police to protect us against these people and we will fight them and fight them to the death if we have to." (Field research notes, November 2009)

Although the violence was for the most part confined to Urumchi, feelings were also running very high in Korla, as revealed by this 28-year-old bar owner:

"They [the Uyghurs] are capable of anything. They are dangerous. I am very afraid now. Before 7/5 I did not feel so afraid but I did not know what the Uyghurs were capable of doing. They killed so many people, it was so awful and shocking. We can never forgive them for what they did and we can never go back to being just neighbours. I think it changed everything here, it certainly did change how I see them." (Field research notes November 2009)

Many Uyghur interviewees spoke of their fear that Han people would attempt to take revenge. While the security services prevented this happening in the days that followed the initial violence, the fear that it would happen at some stage was a recurring one. A 29-year-old Korla shop keeper expressed the view that this was a real possibility, especially when the police and military presence would decrease.

"Now there are so many police and army on the streets but they will not always be there. I have seen pictures and heard from friends what it was like on the day after 7/5, when there were Han on the streets, thousands of them with any sort of weapon they could get their hands on. I am really very afraid of this. It could happen at any time, those kinds of feelings do not just pass." (Field research notes, November 2009)

For this 24-year-old Urumchi native, the July 2009 violence and the security clampdown that followed emphasized just how wide the gap has grown between the two groups:

"After what happened things will never be the same again. It was the most terrible thing that ever happened here. The night it happened I just wanted to get home and be with my wife and children and be safe. I did not open the shop for two weeks after. I was worried that I may be attacked. Many Uyghurs were killed in the days that followed, by the police and by people. It is hard to describe to you just how frightening everything was in those days. I am still very frightened. My children don't sleep very well any more, they wake up crying, they have nightmares. Everyone has nightmares." (Field research notes, November 2009)

Relational comparisons with inner China

Many Han and Uyghur interviewees also expressed relational comparisons with people living further east, in the provinces that have traditionally been considered "China proper" or "inner China". This reveals that both Uyghur and Han are developing a Xinjiang/East Turkestan identity and feel somewhat alienated from China. If anything can be said to unite the Han and the Uyghur, it

is this sense of dislocation from the centre. While it may not be surprising that the majority of Uyghurs expressed a sense of difference from those living in inner China, it is significant that such a large number of Han interviewees expressed similar feelings. This was true not just of those who had lived in Xinjiang for a long time or whose families have been there for generations, but also for some more recently arrived migrants. According to one 68-year-old retired school teacher, who came to Xinjiang in 1964:

"There is a difference between the people who live here and the people in other parts of China, I mean the Han people. Xinjiang is a different place in many ways, with different cultures and customs, life is different here. The climate. the food, so many things are different and of course this has an effect on the people. I think people in other parts of China don't fully appreciate this, in fact they don't know anything about Xinjiang really. It probably seems very far away from them. Xinjiang is still the new frontier and we live on the frontier. This makes us different from the Han people in other parts of China. We are all Chinese but there are different Chinese and the people who live here are not the same as the people who live in the east." (Field research notes, May 2012)

A more recently arrived Urumchi Han resident, a 28-year-old taxi driver who had moved to Xinjiang from his native Anhui 10 years previously, said:

"I think there are many differences between the Han people who live here and the Han people who live in other parts of China. In Xinjiang, we Han are in a minority, and we live with many other nationality groups. There are many issues and also many problems because of this. Before I came here I did not understand any of these things but you learn quickly here, you have to. There are big problems here, like 7/5, which make you think a different way. People in other parts of China have no idea about this, they just see Xinjiang on the television or read about it in the newspapers but they have no idea what it is really like to live here and they don't care." (Field research notes, May 2012)

The increasingly unstable security situation was mentioned by some interviewees in the context of relational comparison with those further east. A 32-year-old businesswoman, who has lived in Xinjiang all her life but whose family are originally from north-eastern China, said:

"Of course we are different from the people in other parts of China. We are all Chinese but they don't understand what it is like here. They don't understand that it can be frightening just to walk down the street. It's not just what happened on

7/5 but also the bombs and other attacks, it could happen anytime. The Han people living in other parts of China don't have to live with that fear every day. I have cousins in Heilongjiang (a province in the northeast of China) and they ask me about it, they worry about me but what can I do, this is my home. The government is like this too, for all they talk about security and the need to protect people against terrorists and for all the money they put into Xinjiang, they don't know this place. There are no high-ranking leaders from Xinjiang, who were born here and understand here. In the Xinjiang government all the leaders are outsiders, how can they know what it is really like here when they have just arrived from Hunan or some other province. These are very different places." (Field research notes, May 2012)

Some Uyghur interviewees also compared the Han in Xinjiang and the Han in other parts of China. For example, a 29-year-old doctor said:

"The older Han people are different from the Han living in the east. They have been here for a long time and have been influenced by the Uyghurs. You can see that in the way they understand us and understand difference. There is much more respect there. Not always of course, but in general. the older Han people are more respectful and sensitive. Younger Han are more like the Han in the east, they are not respectful and they know very little about us. Some of them are uncivilized and maybe dangerous; they don't really want to know anything about us. The younger Han people here seem much more like the Han I met when I was in Beijing and Guangdong, they are often very ignorant about the Uyghurs. Many people in the east of China hold very negative views about Uyghurs, even though they don't know any or have never met any." (Field research notes, November 2010)

A 31-year-old Uyghur trader, who was originally from Kashgar but now based in Urumchi, expressed a view shared by many of my interviewees, that the people in eastern China did not understand the Uyghurs or want to understand them.

"The Han in China don't know anything about us. All the talk about 56 peoples making up the Chinese people is not true at all. Only the Han are the Chinese people. Everything is their culture and their way and they don't care anything about anyone else. They think of us as something wild and different to them. We think of them as alien and lacking belief. We could not be more different." (Field research notes, November 2010).

Conclusion

In examining relational comparisons as an identity content through an exploration of the mutual perceptions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, i.e, the views and beliefs the groups held about each other, this paper has demonstrated that strongly negative perceptions exist among both groupings and across all sections of society. These negative perceptions were expressed frequently by many interviewees and often took the form of negative stereotyping.

These negative views and beliefs of the “other” appear to have worsened and become significantly more prevalent since the July 2009 riots. For many people living in Urumchi, trust seems to have broken down between the two groups. Many interviewees expressed a fear of the other ethnic group and a belief that relations will not improve. The 715 riots will have a profound and lasting impact on Xinjiang.

In a recent paper, Raza Hasmath (2012) examines the increasing impact of migration on Uyghur and Han interactions in urban Xinjiang. It suggests that socio-economic factors, such as segmented labour shares and unequal sectoral distribution in occupational categories, coupled with growing Han migration that intensifies spatial inequalities in urbanisation patterns, have been a major reason behind the contemporary rise of ethno-religious consciousness among Uyghurs. He argues that tensions between Muslim Uyghurs and Han Chinese are not simply a reaction against the state but rather a set of social exchanges forged by both parties utilizing a subjective cost-benefit analysis. My findings would agree with this view but take it further by demonstrating how competition, cultural differences, and the misunderstandings, prejudices, and differing worldviews of the Uyghur and Han have led to a situation where both groups define themselves to a large extent in opposition to the other. The future of Han/Uyghur relations looks poor when both groups’ identity is so deeply entrenched in the expression of difference from the other.

Xinjiang is a deeply divided region with strong cleavages existing between both Han and Uyghur but also strong boundaries within boundaries developing in both groups. By emphasizing their relationship with cultural content this paper has demonstrated the salience of these boundaries. The subjective character of boundaries is precisely implicated by referring to their inner relationships with what they enclose and contain (Conversi, 1999). It is this relationship which provides evidence of something which would otherwise remain obscure to the external observer or analyst. Strongly negative views held by many Uyghur and

Han interviewees about the other have been exacerbated by the violence of July 2009 and indicated a widening separation and entrenchment of boundaries between the two groups.

The need to raise boundaries, while forgetting the content they are supposed to defend, points to deeply rooted feelings of vulnerability and fear among both Han and Uyghur living in Xinjiang. Violence may well be an inescapable logical finale to this parallel stress on boundaries and abdication of culture.

Notes:

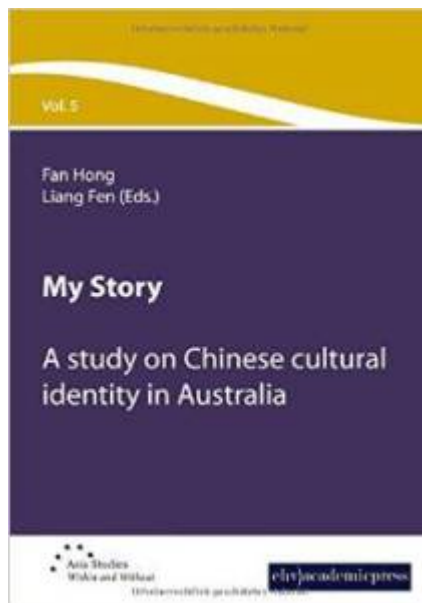
[i] Personal interview, November 2009

[ii] Personal interview, November 2009

About the author:

Dr. David O'Brien is an Assistant Professor at the University of Nottingham's School of Contemporary Chinese studies and is currently based at their campus in Ningbo, China. he has lived and worked in Xinjiang for a number of years and has been a frequent visitor to the region since 2003. His research focuses on the construction of ethnicity and the relationship between state-assigned and self-ascribed identities.

My Story ~ A Study On Chinese Cultural Identity In Australia - Contents & Preface



The book [*My Story ~ A Study On Chinese Cultural Identity In Australia*](#), edited by Fan Hong and Liang Fen has been launched during an international event in Perth, Australia. The book had been published as volume 5 of the series *Asia Studies - Within and Without* - a book series that is kindly supported also by *Rozenberg Quarterly*.

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Preface

The first wave of immigration from China to Australia appeared in the mid-19th century provoked largely by the gold rush of that period. In the 1861 census of Australia's population there were over 38,000 Chinese migrants in Australia and by 1947 it had fallen to 6,400.

Since the 1980s there has been a new wave of Chinese immigration to Australia, and there are now over 415,000 Chinese immigrants, or 'Chinese Australians'. Chinese migrants record high levels of educational attainment that match and occasionally surpass the national average. With a high degree of academic achievement and upward socioeconomic mobility, those Chinese Australians who were born post the 1950s and post 1980s are among the most well educated groups in Australia and comprise a large percentage of Australia's educated class.

This research project is a part of the Cultural Identity Research led by the Confucius Institute at the University of Western Australia which focuses on the Chinese who have migrated to Australia since China opened up to the world in the 1980s. In this book we will tell the stories of these ordinary Chinese, their happiness and sorrows, inspirations and difficulties, and through recorded oral histories we will analyse their cultural identity, and their experience of integration with, and contribution to, this vast far away land.

Most of our interviewees, even if they have been living in Australia for many years, struggle to convey their cultural identity. This project is a precursor to further research on this fascinating universal issue for immigrants.

The project will capture the stories of 100 Chinese in Australia, with experiences reflecting all walks of life including blue collar workers, businessmen, entrepreneurs, politicians, doctors, lawyers, professors, students and housewives. The research team will record, transcribe, and review each interview, and reproduce each individual story, subsequently combining them in a series of books to be published - entitled "*My Story - A study on Chinese cultural identity in Australia.*"

This is Volume 1 of *My Story* it contains 26 stories of 30 people's experiences in Australia. We start from when they first arrive in this foreign land, with their dreams and expectations. They recall their early and simple lives, enabling us to share their hardships, and celebrate their achievements and their pride in their contribution to both countries: Australia and China.

From the beginning of this project, we have received strong support from many Australian Chinese friends within the Chinese community. We acknowledge our gratitude to all the interviewees who offered their precious time, for their willingness to talk openly about their personal lives and to share their experiences, and for their recommending friends and acquaintances to participate in our project as part of our 'snowball sample'. Some interviewees requested that they remain anonymous hence we have concealed the real names for all but one of the all interviewees but all the stories are true and authentic. We hope that their experiences as they continue the journey forward.

We would like to thank Mr Feng Jicai, Professor Jan Ryan, Professor Dennis Haskell, Dr Wang Yi and Mr Lin Gongjin for their guidance and consistent support.

We also thank Mr John C. Reeves, Professor Ian Henry, Dr Chen Hong and Mr Yu Chenggong for the English proofreading of this book; and Mr Wang Liyong and Miss Wang Zhengyu for the Chinese proofreading. We thank the three PhD candidates, Guang Zhixun, Liu Li and Zhang Huijie, for their wonderful editorial assistance. We thank the volunteers of the Confucius Institute of UWA for transcribing tapes, including Hu Siyu, Zhao Wei, Zhou Yu, Zhang Xiangwei, Hou Jingyu and Jiang Mingxue.

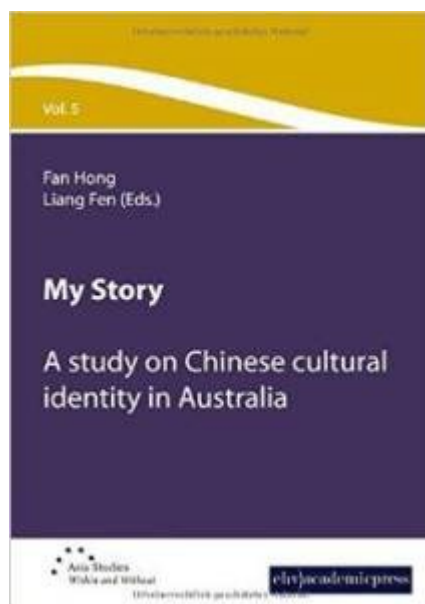
Finally, we thank all the teachers at the Confucius Institute of UWA for their professional expertise and commitment in turning the interviews into compelling stories. The fact that this first volume has been produced in less than a year is testimony to the hard work and continuous effort of the team at the Confucius

Institute.

We hope you enjoy their stories and welcome all comments in what we hope will be a stimulating intercultural dialogue.

Order the book: <http://www.amazon.de/My-Story-cultural-Identity-Australia>

我的故事 ~ 在澳华人的文化身份认同研究 ~ 故事



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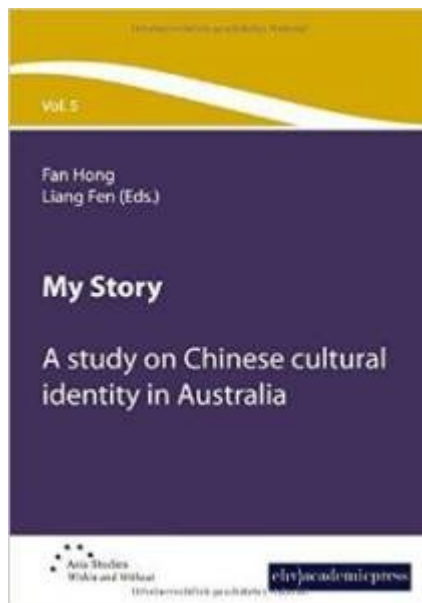
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我的故事 ~ 前言



十九世纪中叶，随着澳洲淘金热，出现了第一次中国人移民澳大利亚的浪潮。据澳大利亚1861年人口统计数据显示，当时在澳华裔人口高达三万八千多。而到了1947年，在澳华裔人数跌至六千四百人。

自二十一世纪八十年代起，从中国来澳大利亚的移民又出现了一个新的浪潮。目前在澳洲生活和工作的华裔超过四十一万五千多人。在他们中间，受过中高层次文化教育的人数已经达到，甚至超过了澳大利亚全民教育平均水平。这些出生于五十年代后和八十年代后的新一代澳洲华人，凭借自身学术上的显著成就和对社会发展的卓越贡献，使他们在澳大利亚受过高等教育者的行列中占据了一席之地。

此项在澳华人的文化身份认同研究为西澳大学孔子学院开展的关于海外华人文化身份认同研究专题的一部分。我们将通过这项研究，集中讲述在二十一世纪八十年代中国改革开放后移民到澳大利亚的中国人的经历。我们将向世界讲述他们的故事，这些故事中有欢乐，有悲伤，有艰难，有成功，也有兴奋。我们将通过这项口述史，进一步探讨中国人在澳大利亚的文化身份认同，使他们的成就以及他们对这片远离中国，辽阔无垠的土地所做出的贡献得到认可。

在进行此项目的过程中，我们发现所有被采访者，不管他们在这片土地上生活了多少年，不管他们在这里取得了多大的成就，他们都始终无法回避一个问题，既文化身份认同的问题。可能每个人都有各自不同的答案，我们想通过这个项目，就每一位海外华人所关心的有关文化身份认同的问题进行深入地研究和探讨。

该项研究包括采访搜集100名在澳华人的故事，他们当中有工人、商人、企业家、政治家、医生、律师、大学教授、在读大学生及家庭主妇等各行各业人士。我们将采访录音誊写成文，之后编撰成书，书名为《我的故事》，以中英文双语，分集出版发行。

本书为《我的故事 — 在澳华人的文化身份认同研究》第一集，共讲述了30名在澳华人不同的经历 — 从他们最初怀揣着各自的梦想，踏上澳洲这片陌生的土地时的情景；回顾他们从最简单开始，用自己的双手和智慧开辟出属于自己的天地的感慨；分享他们打拼创业，功成名就时的喜悦。与此同时，了解他们成功不忘祖国，为让更多的人拥有更美好的生活而继续努力工作，奉献爱心的情怀。

本项目自开始以来，得到西澳大利亚和其他地区的华人社团及各界澳洲华人朋友们的热情支持，他们在繁忙的工作生活中抽出宝贵的时间接受我们的采访，而且还为我们推荐其他华人朋友参与此项目。谨在此表示诚挚的感谢。为了尊重那些不愿被提名的被采访者的要求，除个别故事以外，书中大部分故事主人公的真实姓名被隐去。我们想让大家分享这些动人的真实故事，而这些人也许就生活在你们的社区，甚至就在你的身边。我们想让后一代人记住他们父辈当年打拼创业的故事，沿着他们走过的路，继续向前。

我们诚挚地感谢冯骥才先生、丹尼斯·哈斯克尔教授、简·瑞安教授、王毅博士以及林功金先生对项目的指导，参与和鼎力相助。

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最后，感谢担任本书撰写的西澳大学孔子学院汉语教师团队。正是由于大家共同努力，才使本书在短短不到一年的时间便呈现在读者面前。

希望大家喜欢我们的故事并以此推动跨文化研究的发展。敬请各位专家学者和读者批评指正。

凡红 梁芬

My Story ~ A Creative Research Project



For immigrants, identity is a kind of deep cultural psychology, the pursuit of a mental end-state, and a key part of their specific humanity. Since Australia is an important place for Chinese immigration, research on immigrants' history, their personal struggle, the cultural conflict and integration between themselves and society, as well as their sense of 'life-achievement' are also important. They will contribute to the affirmation and understanding of immigrants' value and identity, to their particular contribution to Australia's development and social harmony, as well as to the active exploration of the impact of Australia's, multicultural policy.

Oral history is an academic approach which has grown in importance since its origins in the 20th century and has been adopted in a wide range of disciplines from anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, to literary heritage. As a kind of living history record focusing on people, studying personal memories, oral history has a unique historical and academic value.

In adopting this approach to the study of the cultural identity of Australian Chinese immigrants, the Confucius Institute at the University of Western Australia has seized upon a very visionary and creative subject. I believe that this project will gradually demonstrate its academic significance, it is certainly a good place to start from,, and we will look forward to sharing this academic achievements.

Feng Jicai

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